



**The Shape of Freedom** is a chronology compiling the history of the pink triangle and other emblems of the movements for homosexual rights in Europe and the United States. Important events in the history of homosexual activism are included, with an emphasis on the pink triangle as a symbol of sexual liberation.

### Triangle

**A basic shape of geometry:** A polygon with three corners or vertices and three sides or edges, which are line segments.

**An emblem:** A pictorial image, abstract or representational, which epitomizes a concept, such as a moral truth or an allegory.

**A symbol:** Something that represents an idea but is distinct from it and its purpose is to communicate meaning.

**Pink Triangle:** A shape, a symbol and an emblem of oppression and liberation: *A shape of freedom.*

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**1867**— On August 29, 1867, Karl-Heinrich Ulrichs became the first self-proclaimed homosexual to speak out publicly for

triangle on their uniform. During the 12-year Nazi regime up to 100,000 men were identified in police records as homosexuals, with about 50,000 convicted of violating Paragraph 175. If they were gay Jews, the lowest rank in the camps, they wore an inverted pink triangle over a yellow Star of David.

**1942**— Hitler stated punishment for homosexuality as murder.

**1946**— The East German psychologist, sexologist and radical gay rights advocate Rudolf Klimmer pushed the Organization of Those Persecuted by the Nazi Regime to acknowledge gay victims and was later able to obtain compensation on their behalf from the East German government.

**1948**— The homophile group Forbundet af 1948 (League of 1948) was formed in Denmark.

**1950s**— The Mattachine Society, the first American homophile group, was founded in Los Angeles. The Daughters of Bilitis, a pioneering national lesbian organization, was founded in San Francisco. RFSL (Swedish Federation for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Rights), the first Swedish homophile group, was formed.

movement. Its emblem was a raised fist inside a pink triangle.

**1972**— Josef Kohout published *The Men with the Pink Triangle* in Germany under the pseudonym Heinz Heger.

**1972**— Sweden becomes the first country in the world to allow transgender people to legally change their sex and to receive free hormone therapy.

**1974**— New York activists protested opposition from Orthodox Jewish groups to a gay rights bill presented before the city council by wearing pink triangles.

**1975**— Two gay West German magazines, HAW—Info and Emanzipation, published simultaneous front-page articles on the persecution of gays in the Holocaust. The HAW—Info article encouraged gays to continue to wear the pink triangle in order to promote its use as a symbol of the relentless discrimination gay people continued to face.

**1978**— When Harvey Milk gave his speech on the persecution of gays during the Holocaust the pink triangle had made appearances in English-language print media and at American gay rights demonstrations. He was assassinated on November 27.

to show their determination to survive the AIDS epidemic.

That same year, black and pink “Silence=Death” posters began appearing in New York City plastered all over the city. By then, 49,000 cases of AIDS, most of them gay men, had been diagnosed and reported to the Centers for Disease Control. Over 43,000 of these cases had died by the beginning of that year, with New Yorkers comprising 25% of the dead.

**1987**— In a speech at the Dachau camp a group of lesbian activists announced that lesbian women were made to wear black triangles and just like gay men they were placed at the lowest ranks in the camps.

**1989**— Denmark became the first country to enact registered partnership laws.

**Early 90s**— The rainbow superseded the pink triangle to become the new popular emblem for “gay pride.”

**1993**— 10 Percent, the gay magazine, dispraised the use of the pink triangle as a gay symbol sparking mass debate amongst its readers who believed that relating the treatment of gays during the AIDS epidemic to the treatment of gays in the Holocaust was not far reached.

patterns of abuse, a distinguished group of international human rights experts met in Yogyakarta, Indonesia to outline a set of international principles relating to sexual orientation and gender identity. The result was the *Yogyakarta Principles*, a universal guide to human rights affirming binding international legal standards with which all States must comply.

**2008-2009**— Voters in California support Proposition 8, a ballot that eliminated rights of same-sex couples to marry. On May 26, 2009, California’s Supreme Court upheld Proposition 8, but did not overturn previous same-sex marriages.

**2009-2010**— Same-sex marriage was legalized in Argentina, Iceland, Norway, and Portugal.

**August 2011**— The last known Holocaust survivor to have worn the pink triangle, Rudolf Brazed, died at the age of 98.

**2011**— Same sex marriage is legalized in New York and “Don’t Ask Don’t Tell” is revoked in the United States.

**2012-2013**— Since 2012, in Russia, displays of homosexuality that could influence and “coerce” children are outlawed, soliciting fines for anyone who

align with their gender identity.

**2017**— On October 4, President Trump’s Justice Department rescinded a memo that interpreted the Civil Rights Act to protect transgender workers, potentially opening people up to discrimination in the workplace due to their gender identity.

**2018**— On March 23, President Donald Trump signed a memorandum that bans transgender people from U.S. military service.

**2018**— In June, President Trump failed to recognize LGBTQI Pride Month.

**2018**— On June 4, The U.S. Supreme Court issued a narrow ruling in favor of Masterpiece Cakeshop, a bakery in Colorado that refused service to a same-sex couple. It highlighted the unfair treatment of Jack Phillips, the owner of the bakery, and his religious beliefs.

**2018**— On June 27, the U.S. Justice Department, led by Attorney General Jeff Sessions, filed a friend-of-the-court brief at the US Court of Appeals for the Second Circuit arguing that Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 doesn’t prohibit discrimination based on sexual orientation.

# Liberation is a collective process

homosexual rights when he pleaded at the Congress of German Jurists in Munich for a resolution urging the repeal of anti-homosexual laws.

**1910**— U.S. based activist Emma Goldman first began speaking publicly in her speeches and texts in favor of homosexual rights.

**1924**— The Society for Human Rights, the first gay rights organization in the United States, was founded in Chicago. The movement existed for a few months before being shut down by the police.

**1934**— A secret German police division on homosexuals was set up. One of its first acts was to order the police “pink lists” from all throughout Germany. These lists, which revealed the names of male homosexuals, had been compiled since 1900.

**1935**— Paragraph 175 of the German criminal code, which outlawed male homosexual acts, was revised by Adolph Hitler and came to include kissing, hugging, gay fantasies, and sexual acts between men.

**1937-1940**— 25,000 convicted “gay” offenders were forced into prison and then into concentration camps where they were made to wear a pink inverted

**1969**— The West German magazine *Der Spiegel* made its cover story on the reform of Paragraph 175 of the criminal code, which decriminalized acts of male homosexuality for those over the age of 21.

**1969**— Police raided New York City’s Stonewall Inn in June. They checked for identification, made homophobic and transphobic comments, and physically assaulted LGBT community members. Instead of quietly taking police abuses, the community fought back. This was one of the first LGBT mass uprisings in the U.S. lasting for nearly three days.

**1970**— Memories of Nazi persecution of gays surfaced in the politicized framework of the gay liberation years. Lesbians shared their memories of the pink triangle and of gay persecution and played a significant role in re-contextualizing the pink triangle as a symbol of pride and liberation.

**1970**— First Gay Liberation Day March held New York City, First Gay Freedom Day March held in Los Angeles, and first Gay-in held in San Francisco.

**1971**— In West Berlin a group of young, frustrated gay men formed the Gay Action West Berlin (HAW), the first radical organization of the German gay

**1980**— The Broadway play *Bent* by Martin Sherman honed in on two gay German inmates in a concentration camp during which one inmate exchanged his pink triangle for a yellow star in order to avoid the worst treatment.

**1981**— First reports of AIDS became known to the public, during which writers and activists looked to the pink triangle as the most appropriate emblem for their current suffering.

**1981**— Norway becomes the first country in the world to enact a law to prevent discrimination against homosexuals.

**1985**— First official recognition of gay Nazi persecution shown in Austria from Mauthausen, a former concentration camp, which allowed a gay organization to place a plaque on its premises: A pink triangle with the engraving, “Beaten to death – Silenced to death” (Totgeschlagen-Totgeschweigen).

**1987**— Six gay activists in New York City conceived the “Silence = Death” project, which used an inverted pink triangle on posters. The activists later joined The Aids Coalition to Unleash Power (ACT UP); a grass roots activist organization founded in the same year, and offered the logo as its symbol. The pink triangle was used right side up within ACT UP

**1993**— The “Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell” policy is instituted for the U.S. military, permitting gays to serve in the military but banning homosexual activity. President Clinton’s original intention to revoke the prohibition against gays in the military was met with stiff opposition. This led to the discharge of thousands of men and women from the armed forces.

**1994**— In June, REPOhistory, an artist collective based in New York, installed pink, triangular street signs on lamp posts throughout lower Manhattan that referenced over-looked gay, lesbian and trans histories.

**1995**— Since gay pride of 1995, The Pink Triangle organization of San Francisco has placed a giant pink triangle on top of the twin peaks to commemorate the losses of gay victims of the holocaust.

**2000**— The documentary film *Paragraph 175* included the testimonies of homosexual holocaust survivors.

**2005**— The Church of Sweden, the former state church, held blessing ceremonies for same-sex couples, who can already enter into registered partnerships equal to marriage.

**2006**— In response to well-documented

espouses “public actions aimed at propaganda of sodomy, lesbianism, bisexuality, and transgenderism among minors.”

**2013**— On June 26, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled in *Windsor v. U.S.* that Section 3 of the Defense of Marriage Act, the 1996 law that denies legally married same-sex couples over 1,100 protections and responsibilities of marriage, is unconstitutional.

**2014**— Uganda hosted its first gay pride rally since a draconian anti-homosexuality law that threatened homosexuals with the death penalty was overturned by the courts causing national and international outcry.

**2016**— On June 12, an armed man, Omar Mateen, killed 49 people at Pulse nightclub in Orlando, Florida. This hate crime against the LGBTQI community is also one of the largest massacres of civilians in the history of the United States.

**2017**— On February 22, the Trump administration officially revoked an Obama-era guidance protecting transgender students in federally funded public schools, including their right to use bathrooms and locker rooms that

“Dead power is everywhere among us — in the forest, chopping down the songs; at night in the industrial landscape, wasting and stiffening the new life; in the streets of the city, throwing away the day. We wanted something different for our people: not to find ourselves an old, reactionary republic, full of ghost-fears, the fears of death and the fears of birth. We want something else.”

— Muriel Rukeyser, *The Life of Poetry*



Information compiled by Carlos Motta.

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